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SOME FUNDAMENTALS OF EXTENSION TEACHING

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Extinction Teaching

SOME FUNDAMENTALS OF EXTENSION TEACHING

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The Purpose of Teaching

At the outset it is desirable to call attention to something as old as the hills and that is the fundamental teaching principles, which lead from the known to the related unknown, from the concrete to the abstract; to start with a simple practice and let the people get that before taking up something else; to instruct them to do the thing and then find out why afterwards. College appeal is made the other way - discussion and then laboratory work. But the great mass will usually work from an existing practice back to the reason for it, or the underlying principles. Then the next step is in working from the simple practice to the complex performance.

Thus, to teach more successfully the things in keeping with men's needs, we must know their mental characteristics.

The purpose of a teaching process is to guide the mind of a person to do a thing better than he has done it before. Among extension forces knowledge of a person's manner of expression and personal characteristics is necessary in order to cause this thinking and acting to be in harmony with best practices.

In olden days the country doctor jumped on his horse or into his buggy, went out to see his patient, diagnosed the case, left some pills or powders wrapped in slips cut from a newspaper, and departed, having given more directions as to what was best to be done along the lines of nursing, perhaps, than as to effects that the medicine might have on the patient. In that day medical students went to school for about six months and then came before the world to practice. They based their practice on what they knew to be best at that time.

The time has come, however, when all the medical colleges of good standing give four-year courses in the science of medicine, including courses in applied psychology, the theory of hypnosis, the power of suggestion, and many other things that have to do with the psychological aspects of man. All this is deemed essential in order to practice medicine which requires specific diagnosis of the peculiarities of the individual. Doctors are aiming to influence both the mind and the body toward right conditions, and, in order to change existing conditions, they must bring the patient back to the real, the natural attitude. The physician has therefore brought many phases of science to bear upon his practice. The lawyer has done the same; likewise the manufacturer and the lecturer. The extension teacher has a job equal to the physician's and the lawyer's in this respect, because he must make a like appeal to the person, and not only to one person, but to a group of people.

Natural Characteristics of Man

There are certain appeals that we must make to certain people. The same stimulus, the same instruction, the same demonstration, will not always affect to the same degree, for all of the men in a group are not able to analyze or to get the same features out of a lesson. There are those who are more advanced in their power to think and better able to digest and to put the new thing into practice. But these may be relatively few in number, and our appeal to the others

needs to be made in different terms. Only a small number of a group have the power of thinking from principle to practice, or can take a number of principles and apply them in developing complex practices. This group who think from the principle to the practice constitutes a small percentage of persons.

Even those who may be very intelligent along some one or few lines, whether gardeners, livestock men, or what, are frequently back again in the class with the large group in regard to some ordinary commonplace things. These people may be more directly comprehensive of certain conclusions than others. The great mass, therefore, must be appealed to not only through their reason, but through certain major, basic instincts.

Instinct as a Factor in Extension Teaching

It is desired to mention some of the essential points in making an appeal. Attract attention, interest, confidence, and desire, but also bring about decision and action, for these must be gained before the appeal is completely consummated. This is best gained when approached through bringing about the sense of joy or pleasure. Make the people feel that they will be glad if they do that thing, and the good habit will soon follow.

Gregariousness.— Man is a social, group-loving animal; he must be where others are. We find another characteristic that must be taken seriously into consideration in extension teaching, which is that man is also an imitative animal and impelled to do things that others do. For example, men all wear collars, not always the same kind of collars, but they all have the same general style. There are thousands of commonplace things of life to which we are responding through the imitative instinct. We must use the crowd-loving characteristic in order to obtain most satisfying results from a lecture, an automobile tour, a field meeting, or other extension activity in a community. The object lesson, a demonstration, let us say, will have much the same effect upon the whole crowd. The crowd in the automobile tour all go to the same place, and each brings back much the same ideas, yet not exactly the same. There may be that slight differentiation that in the end makes the real lesson more prominent. But with a fuller knowledge of the many influences that get abroad into crowds or on trains or in meetings, we take advantage of the group-loving tendency of the people in order to get a general practice established in a community, for they all, more or less, will receive a stimulus.

Self-preservation.- To speak of appealing to our instincts does not mean that we are entirely like the lower animals. One of those instincts is that of self-preservation. If I were making an appeal to a mother as to the improvement of her child's health, or of her own health, or of the family's health, I might say, "Perhaps they should eat more vegetables, because eating vegetables will prolong life." Everybody would like to live to be 100 years old. A recently displayed sign read "Drink buttermilk and live to be a hundred." I do not know how much truth there is in that, but the sign itself was all right because of two things - the suggestion to drink buttermilk, and by doing that, live to be a hundred. That appeals to the instinct of self-preservation which each of us naturally has. We all want to see our families and those in whom we are directly concerned live as long as possible. We want the health of the whole community improved. "Weigh these children and let's see how much improvement they will make in six months' time if they drink milk" is advised by the nutrition specialist. That is one of the direct appeals; we do not wish to go through all the farmers' bulletins and circulars for this advice. We want simple suggestions of what to do that the life may be prolonged.

Ego.- We have also an egoistic instinct, a desire to be known by our fellowmen. It is well, in our extension work, if we can go on a tour or into a home and say, for instance, "You have a fine wheat field, or a fine animal, or an improved washing machine, and so forth," taking notice of the things that are good. One of the weak spots in extension work is that we do not pay enough attention to the good things people are doing. People really want to do more things that will cause them to stand out as individuals and be known among men and women. All of that appeals to them on account of the "I-ness" of the individual, the that which says "I want to be something," I do not care how many of us say, "I do not want credit for that" - everyone of us would have to admit that we like individual recognition. There is no exception. The extension agent should make his appeal to individual success a strong one.

Hoarding.- Another appeal to be used in extension work is that made to the instinct that causes a person to save or hoard. The small boy who has a little desk or drawer some place where he can put yellow glass, string, and the like, forgets that he has them, and why he put them there; yet the fact that he thought to put them there is a good omen. He had a very present reason when he put them there, although a few hours afterwards he had forgotten it. I do not think it is the squirrel's habit to hoard in order that he may have something to eat; he has the habit of

hoarding, and it is because he has this habit that his life is carried through, since he has food in store. Man can add intelligence to that habit. He can hoard and save, but there is an economic aspect to his doing that. Man does this that he may have something to feed his children, to satisfy that "protect the race" instinct; that he may have money to send his children to school; that he may have a piano, a victrola, and many other home things. It is that saving tendency that we should take advantage of in order to get him to do certain things.

Imitation.- There is another instinct - a strong, impelling one - to do what other people do, to imitate. The home demonstration agent has been putting on canning exhibitions year after year. The effect of these exhibitions may not be known the first year, but it is known that they have an effect. The second year she adds a few things and perhaps changes the style, but she keeps on giving exhibitions and after awhile somebody says, "They keep this thing before me so much that I believe I could try it." Then, they may reason, "Canning will make our health better and save money for us."

The following appeals, therefore, may be used in extension work:

- (1) Appeal to the instinct of self-preservation.
- (2) The egoistic instinct which gives standing in society, and leadership.
- (3) The hoarding instinct.
- (4) The appeal to the tendency of everyone to do as others do.
- (5) The appeal to reason.

The Effect of Age upon Instinct

The tendency to imitation predominates in early life. Persons appealed to should be given an opportunity to imitate what is presented to them. Self-assertion predominates in the second period; persons should be given a chance for expression, and not repression. The third period is marked by the expression of the social tendencies. These first three periods must be appealed to in club work and plans should be made to appeal to young people because of these characteristics. There is a period in adults from 25 to 35 years which is known as the missionary period. Young men and women leave college and it is their desire to teach, to pass on the information they have acquired. Here and there among this group are people who want to lead, and they should be looked to for leadership in most cases.

Suggestion v. Reason as a Factor in Extension Teaching

People do things through the suggestion of rhythm. For instance, they may hear the lines:

"Lime and lime without manure, makes both farm and farmer
poor,
Lime, manure, and vigorous clover makes the farmers smile
all over."

They may carry that home and put it into practice merely from sensing the rhythm, the reason coming afterwards.

It is desirable also that every extension worker think of certain physical conditions that may help the mind to receive a demonstration, a lecture, or an exhibit. Lighting, comfortable chairs, and position, temperature of a room, and so forth, are factors to be considered. These things add to the comfort and will add to the ability to think.

Continuity and Repetition as a Factor in Extension Teaching

I want to call attention to one other fundamental. There must be a continuity of bringing impressions to people's minds, by publicity and other means. Publicity is the strong arm of appeal. "Stop, look, and listen" is a direct appeal which brings forces into action. Then, with publicity articles, lectures, and movies, we come to the demonstration, which we may follow with slides to fix the impression on the mind of the people. The story told to the people in the news item is also told in the field meeting, in slogans, rhymes, and songs. There are also achievement days for the young and old. All of these things should be done over and over again.

Habits of Travel Determine Location of Demonstrations

Some observations have been made which would hardly be dignified by the name survey, resulting in the establishment of certain average distances which people travel to the railway station, to the church, to school, and even to demonstrations, field meetings, and lectures. It was found a few years ago that in northeastern United States the average distance traveled to an agricultural extension school and to a field demonstration was about 3 1/2 miles; in the North Central States it averaged about 5 miles, and in some of the States west of the 100th Meridian it was about 10 miles.

Taking these distances as radii of circles around the demonstration, one might figure safely that in the more level agricultural parts of our country they should not be very far apart.

Consideration should be given the travel habits of people. Are distances too great? Is the direction to the demonstration contrary to that which they usually travel to church, to the local market, the railway station, or the school? Ofttimes the necessity for contrary-wise travel prevents the individual from feeling the sense of ease or pleasure that should attend his going. Demonstrations may be so grouped that they are entirely too close together, and some other part of the community or county is unable to have an opportunity to observe them.

The Number of One Kind of Demonstration Assists to
Determine the Adoption of a Practice

The group-loving habits of man and his tendency to imitate is manifested by the effect on him of the mass or group. If there are but two or three demonstrations, he hears little of them and sees less, and the number affects him very little. If there are 25 or 50 in a county he is then affected by the number, even though he does not visit more than two or three of them, or sometimes only one of them. The number helps him to feel that he should do as others do, therefore the way to his accepting a practice is made easier. He feels a loyalty and responsibility to a group of which he desires to be a part, and he will defend himself many times by stating that there are others doing the same thing that he is doing.

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